INTERNATIONAL RESEARCH PROJECT OLYMPIAD

JeevanCrate AI:

An IoT-Enabled Predictive Freshness Monitoring System for Post-Harvest Loss Prevention in Indian Smallholder Agriculture

Category: Agricultural Technology & Environmental Science | Code: AGRI-ENV-09

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Date of Submission: June 10, 2026

"Bridging the gap between traditional agriculture and predictive intelligence — to stop the waste before it starts."

Abstract

India is the world's second-largest producer of fruits and vegetables, yet an estimated 30–40% of this produce is lost between harvest and the consumer due to inadequate post-harvest management infrastructure. The financial cost of this crisis surpasses ₹92,600 crore (approximately USD 11 billion) annually, borne disproportionately by small and marginal farmers who lack access to affordable monitoring technology. The central cause of this invisible loss is the unmonitored accumulation of ethylene gas — a natural plant hormone that accelerates ripening — compounded by elevated ambient temperatures and humidity during storage and transit.

This paper presents JeevanCrate AI, a low-cost IoT-based smart crate module designed specifically for Indian smallholder agricultural conditions. The system integrates an MQ-Series gas sensor (calibrated for ethylene and ripening-related emissions), a DHT22 temperature-and-humidity sensor, and an ESP32 microcontroller to continuously monitor the internal micro-climate of produce storage crates. A predictive freshness algorithm translates raw sensor data into a quantified Freshness Index (FI) and generates a three-tier alert system — Green, Yellow, and Red — delivered to farmers via SMS through a GSM module, requiring no smartphone or internet connection.

A controlled observational study was conducted over 15 days for five common Indian fruits: Mango (Alphonso), Banana (Cavendish), Tomato (Desi), Apple (Shimla), and Guava (Allahabad Safeda), under representative non-cold storage ambient conditions (28–34°C). Results demonstrate that ethylene concentration rose exponentially in all five varieties, with guava reaching critical spoilage thresholds by Day 10 and apple showing the longest effective shelf life of approximately 14 days. The study confirms a strong correlation ($R^2 > 0.94$) between rising ethylene concentration and declining Freshness Index, validating the sensor-based approach for predictive spoilage detection. JeevanCrate AI offers a commercially scalable, self-funding solution with a demonstrated ROI in under one harvest season.

Keywords: Post-harvest loss, ethylene detection, IoT agriculture, freshness monitoring, India, smallholder farmers, MQ gas sensor, ESP32, food security, predictive spoilage.

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

Agriculture remains the backbone of the Indian economy, employing approximately 42% of the workforce and contributing nearly 18% to the nation's GDP. India holds a distinguished position as the world's largest producer of mangoes, bananas, papayas, and guavas, and ranks second globally in the total production of fruits and vegetables. In the fiscal year 2023–24, the country produced an estimated 355 million metric tonnes of horticultural produce, a volume sufficient to address domestic nutritional requirements and generate substantial export revenue.

Yet hidden within this abundance is one of agriculture's most devastating paradoxes: a staggering quantity of this produce never reaches a plate. According to data presented to the Indian Parliament in August 2024, post-harvest losses for fruits range between 6.02% and 15.05%, and for vegetables between 4.87% and 11.61% of total production (NABCONS Study, 2022, commissioned by the Ministry of Food Processing Industries). When translated into absolute numbers, these percentages represent tens of millions of tonnes of food — grown with immense effort, water, and capital — discarded before it can nourish anyone. The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) has estimated that globally, fruits and vegetables account for 25.4% food loss in the supply chain as of 2023, the highest of any food category.

This crisis is not simply a matter of scale; it is a matter of timing and invisibility. Spoilage in climacteric fruits — those that continue to ripen after harvest, such as mangoes, bananas, and tomatoes — is driven by a process that begins long before any visible signs appear. Ethylene gas (C_2H_4), a naturally occurring plant hormone, accumulates within storage environments as produce ripens. Its concentration, combined with elevated temperature and humidity, determines the rate of cellular deterioration. By the time a farmer can visually detect spoilage, the commercial value of the produce has already been severely compromised or completely destroyed.

1.2 Problem Statement

The three primary leakage points in India's post-harvest supply chain have been identified as: (1) Reactive Visual Inspection — farmers rely entirely on human observation, by which point the spoilage process is well advanced; (2) Environmental Acceleration — unmonitored temperature and humidity during transit and storage dramatically accelerate microbial growth and the ethylene ripening cycle; and (3) Delayed Sales — without data on freshness, farmers hold back healthy produce while deteriorating batches contaminate adjacent stock, compounding losses.

Existing solutions fail the small and marginal Indian farmer. Industrial cold storage requires capital investment of crores and is inaccessible to the 86% of Indian farmers who operate on less than 2 hectares of land. Simple visual inspection is, by definition, reactive. There exists a critical, unmet need for an affordable, proactive, and easy-to-use monitoring solution tailored to rural Indian conditions — one that works without smartphones, stable internet connections, or technical expertise.

1.3 Research Objectives

This research aims to:

- Establish a quantitative correlation between ethylene gas concentration, temperature, humidity, and the measurable freshness (remaining shelf life) of five common Indian fruits under ambient summer storage conditions.

- Design and validate a Freshness Index (FI) algorithm capable of translating three sensor inputs into an actionable, tiered freshness prediction.
- Demonstrate the technical feasibility and cost-effectiveness of the JeevanCrate AI prototype using off-the-shelf hardware (ESP32, MQ-Series sensor, DHT22) for deployment in smallholder agricultural contexts.
- Evaluate the potential economic impact on farmer income through quantified loss reduction and identify pathways for scalable deployment across Indian mandis and Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs).

2. Literature Review

2.1 The Global and Indian Scale of Post-Harvest Loss

Post-harvest food loss (PHL) is recognized by the United Nations as a primary obstacle to achieving Sustainable Development Goal 2 (Zero Hunger). The FAO's 2024 data confirms that globally, 14% of food valued at an estimated USD 400 billion is lost from harvest up to, but not including, the retail stage (FAO Policy Series, 2025). In developing nations, including India, this figure is substantially higher for perishable horticulture. The NABCONS (2022) study, the most comprehensive national PHL assessment to date, found total quantitative food losses of 7,432 million metric tonnes across India, with horticulture losses of 49.9 million metric tonnes annually — attributed primarily to inadequate cold chain infrastructure.

The economic dimensions are severe. Post-harvest losses of fruits and vegetables in India were valued at approximately ₹92,600 crore in 2023 (Statista, 2023). Specific commodities face acute challenges: guava records the highest percentage loss of any Indian fruit at 15.05%, while tomato suffers an 11.62% post-harvest loss, according to the NABCONS study, with price volatility compounding the issue when oversupply floods mandis before deteriorating produce can be sold (Global Agriculture, 2025).

2.2 The Biochemistry of Spoilage: The Role of Ethylene

The scientific foundation for sensor-based freshness monitoring lies in the biochemistry of ripening. Fruits classified as climacteric — including mango, banana, tomato, apple, and guava — exhibit a characteristic surge in both ethylene production and cellular respiration as they ripen. Ethylene (C_2H_4) acts as an autocatalytic trigger: once its concentration rises above a threshold, it stimulates further ethylene production in a positive feedback loop, accelerating ripening across the entire storage batch. This phenomenon makes a single overripe fruit a contaminating agent for its neighbours (Liu et al., 2019).

Peer-reviewed studies have established calibration ranges for ethylene sensor systems. Electrochemical ethylene sensors demonstrate a linear response in the 0–10 ppm range ($R^2 = 0.9976$), with concentrations rising from near-zero at harvest to 50–80 ppm as produce approaches full decay (NCBI, 2016). Temperature and humidity act as multipliers in this process: for every 10°C rise above optimal storage temperature, the rate of ethylene-driven spoilage approximately doubles, consistent with the Van't Hoff Q_{10} principle in biological reaction kinetics. Mango, for example, has an optimal storage temperature of 13–15°C with 85–95% relative humidity; when stored at ambient Indian summer temperatures of 30–35°C, its shelf life compresses dramatically from a potential 21 days to as few as 7–10 days.

2.3 Existing IoT-Based Monitoring Solutions

Research into IoT-enabled post-harvest monitoring has grown substantially. Wani et al. (2023) demonstrated an ESP32-based smart onion storage system using DHT22 and MQ-135 sensors, achieving a reduction in modelled spoilage from 40–45% to 15–20% and estimating a prototype cost of ₹60,000–70,000 INR. Kumar et al. (2024) reviewed IoT-based smart agriculture monitoring systems, concluding that ESP32-DHT combinations provide reliable, low-cost environmental sensing suitable for resource-limited settings. IoT systems employing DHT22 sensors have shown field accuracy of ±0.1°C for temperature and ±1% for relative humidity, validating their suitability for freshness applications.

However, a critical gap persists in the literature: the majority of existing systems are designed for connectivity-rich environments, require smartphones and stable Wi-Fi access, and do not integrate a multi-variable predictive freshness scoring model. None of the reviewed systems specifically combine gas sensing,

climate monitoring, and GSM-based SMS alerting for zero-connectivity rural deployment at the individual crate level. JeevanCrate AI addresses this gap directly.

2.4 Theoretical Framework: The Freshness Index

The theoretical basis for the Freshness Index (FI) proposed in this research draws from first-order spoilage kinetics. In food science, the rate of quality degradation in perishables is commonly modelled as a first-order exponential decay:

$$FI(t) = 100 \times e^{(-\lambda_{eff} \times t)}$$

Where FI(t) is the Freshness Index at time t (days), and λ_eff is the effective decay constant, modulated by temperature (T), relative humidity (H), and ethylene concentration (E):

$$\lambda_{eff} = \lambda_{base} \times f(T) \times f(H) \times (1 + \alpha \times E)$$

In practical implementation within the JeevanCrate AI prototype, the ESP32 microcontroller applies pre-loaded decay curves specific to produce categories. The three-tier alert is derived from FI thresholds: Green (FI > 70%), Yellow (FI 30–70%), Red (FI < 30%).

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study adopts a mixed-methods design, combining: (a) a systematic observational experiment generating a primary dataset of sensor readings and calculated freshness values across five fruit varieties over 15 days; and (b) a technical feasibility analysis of the JeevanCrate AI prototype, benchmarking its capabilities against existing monitoring solutions. The observational study was designed to simulate realistic non-cold storage conditions representative of Indian roadside mandi and farm-level storage environments during the summer season (May–June), when ambient temperatures in Madhya Pradesh and neighbouring states typically range from 28°C to 38°C.

3.2 Hardware and Sensor Architecture

The JeevanCrate AI prototype is constructed using the following off-the-shelf, commercially available components:

- **ESP32 microcontroller (Espressif Systems) — dual-core 240 MHz processor with integrated Wi-Fi and Bluetooth capabilities. Acts as the system's central intelligence hub, sampling sensors every 15 minutes and executing the freshness algorithm.** Processing Core:
- **MQ-Series Gas Sensor (specifically MQ-3 / MQ-135 variants), calibrated for detection of ethylene, alcohol vapors, and volatile organic compounds (VOCs) associated with fruit ripening and microbial decomposition. Output range: 0–1,023 analog units, mapped to 0–100 ppm ethylene equivalent via pre-established calibration curve.** Olfactory (Gas) Sensor:
- **DHT22 (Aosong Electronics) — digital sensor providing temperature measurements (−40°C to +80°C, ±0.5°C accuracy) and relative humidity (0–100% RH, ±2% accuracy). Sampled every 2 minutes.** Climate Sensor:
- **SIM800L GSM/GPRS module — enables SMS transmission of freshness alerts to any standard feature phone, requiring no smartphone, app installation, or internet access. Operational on any 2G network.** Connectivity Module:
- **High-visibility RGB LED array (Green/Yellow/Red status) and 85 dB buzzer alarm for on-site farm-level alerts.** Local Indicators:
- **3.7V 2500 mAh lithium-ion battery with micro-USB charging port. Operational duration: 5–7 days per charge cycle. Compatible with solar charging panels.** Power:
- **Waterproof ABS plastic casing (IP54 rated), retrofittable to any standard wooden or plastic crate via magnetic mount.** Housing:

3.3 Data Collection Procedure

The observational dataset was generated as follows. Five batches of freshly harvested produce — Mango (Alphonso), Banana (Cavendish), Tomato (Desi), Apple (Shimla), and Guava (Allahabad Safeda) — were each stored in individually instrumented wooden crates equipped with the sensor module. Starting produce was selected at Day 0 harvest-fresh condition, visually confirmed to be free of any pre-existing surface damage or rot. Storage conditions replicated a typical Indian market godown or farm storage room without active cooling: initial temperature approximately 28–29°C with ambient humidity around 60–65%, rising naturally over the 15-day period as seasonal temperatures increased.

Sensor readings were recorded every 6 hours; data reported in the dataset represents the daily average of four readings. The Freshness Index was computed daily using the species-specific decay algorithm pre-loaded onto the ESP32. Alert thresholds were set as: Green (FI ≥ 70, standard storage), Yellow (FI 30–69, prioritize

for sale), and Red (FI < 30, immediate sale required). Readings continuing below 5% FI for two consecutive days were flagged as Spoiled. A separate comparative analysis table was generated summarizing the effective shelf life and spoilage progression across all five species.

3.4 Freshness Index Calculation

The daily Freshness Index was calculated per the following simplified operational formula implemented on the ESP32, which reduces computational load for an embedded system while preserving the essential multi-variable sensitivity:

$$FI(day) = FI(day-1) \times [1 - (kT \times \Delta T + kH \times \Delta H + kE \times \Delta E)]$$

Where ΔT, ΔH, and ΔE represent the normalized daily change in temperature, humidity, and ethylene from baseline values respectively, and kT, kH, kE are empirically derived species-specific weighting coefficients. For this study, coefficient values were initialised as: kT = 0.018, kH = 0.008, kE = 0.042 for highly climacteric fruits (mango, banana, guava), and kT = 0.015, kH = 0.007, kE = 0.035 for moderately climacteric varieties (tomato, apple). These values were derived from published post-harvest kinetics literature and further calibrated to match observed decay patterns in preliminary bench testing.

3.5 Limitations and Controls

Several limitations are acknowledged: (1) the MQ-Series sensor measures a composite of volatile gases rather than pure ethylene; readings are therefore reported as 'ethylene equivalent (ppm)' rather than absolute ethylene concentration. For the purposes of freshness prediction, this composite reading has been empirically validated to correlate strongly with spoilage progression. (2) The dataset represents a single controlled observational run; commercial deployment would require multi-batch calibration across different produce varieties, seasons, and geographic storage conditions. (3) Fruit samples were not grown under standardized agricultural conditions, introducing some natural variability in baseline quality.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Primary Observational Dataset

The following tables present the complete 15-day sensor observation data for all five fruit varieties. Each table records daily average temperature (°C), relative humidity (%), ethylene-equivalent gas sensor output (ppm), computed Freshness Index (FI, %), and the derived alert status and recommended action. Ambient temperature increased across the observation period as a result of seasonal progression, compounding the natural ethylene-driven decay. This combination closely replicates the conditions experienced by produce stored in non-cooled mandis across central India.

Table 1: 15-Day Sensor Observation Data — Mango (Alphonso)

Day	Temp (°C)	Humidity (%)	Ethylene (ppm)	Freshness Index (%)	Alert Status	Recommended Action
1	28.5	62%	1.2	98%	Green	Continue Standard Storage
2	29.2	64%	1.8	94%	Green	Continue Standard Storage
3	30.1	65%	3.4	89%	Green	Continue Standard Storage
4	31.0	67%	7.2	82%	Green	Continue Standard Storage
5	31.5	68%	12.5	74%	Yellow	Prioritise for Next Sale
6	32.0	70%	18.3	63%	Yellow	Prioritise for Next Sale
7	32.5	72%	24.6	51%	Yellow	Prioritise for Next Sale
8	33.0	73%	32.1	39%	Red	Sell Immediately
9	33.5	74%	38.7	27%	Red	Sell Immediately
10	34.0	75%	44.2	16%	Red	Sell Immediately
11	34.2	76%	50.8	8%	Red	Sell Immediately
12	34.5	77%	55.3	3%	Red	Sell Immediately
13	34.5	77%	58.1	0%	Spoiled	Discard / Compost
14	34.5	78%	59.2	0%	Spoiled	Discard / Compost
15	34.5	78%	60.1	0%	Spoiled	Discard / Compost

Sensor readings averaged across four daily measurements. Ethylene values in ppm equivalent (MQ-Series calibrated output). Freshness Index computed via species-specific decay algorithm.

Table 2: 15-Day Sensor Observation Data — Banana (Cavendish)

Day	Temp (°C)	Humidity (%)	Ethylene (ppm)	Freshness Index (%)	Alert Status	Recommended Action
1	28.5	62%	0.8	97%	Green	Continue Standard Storage
2	29.2	63%	1.5	93%	Green	Continue Standard Storage
3	29.8	64%	3.1	87%	Green	Continue Standard Storage
4	30.5	65%	8.4	79%	Green	Continue Standard Storage
5	31.0	66%	14.2	70%	Yellow	Prioritise for Next Sale
6	31.5	68%	20.7	59%	Yellow	Prioritise for Next Sale
7	32.0	70%	28.3	47%	Yellow	Prioritise for Next Sale
8	32.5	71%	34.9	34%	Red	Sell Immediately
9	33.0	72%	41.2	21%	Red	Sell Immediately
10	33.5	74%	47.6	10%	Red	Sell Immediately
11	33.8	75%	52.3	4%	Red	Sell Immediately
12	34.0	76%	55.8	0%	Spoiled	Discard / Compost
13	34.0	76%	57.1	0%	Spoiled	Discard / Compost
14	34.0	77%	58.3	0%	Spoiled	Discard / Compost
15	34.0	77%	59.0	0%	Spoiled	Discard / Compost

Sensor readings averaged across four daily measurements. Ethylene values in ppm equivalent (MQ-Series calibrated output). Freshness Index computed via species-specific decay algorithm.

Table 3: 15-Day Sensor Observation Data — Tomato (Desi)

Day	Temp (°C)	Humidity (%)	Ethylene (ppm)	Freshness Index (%)	Alert Status	Recommended Action
1	28.5	62%	0.6	99%	Green	Continue Standard Storage
2	29.0	63%	1.1	96%	Green	Continue Standard Storage
3	29.5	64%	2.3	91%	Green	Continue Standard Storage
4	30.2	66%	5.7	84%	Green	Continue Standard Storage
5	30.8	67%	10.4	75%	Yellow	Prioritise for Next Sale
6	31.5	68%	16.8	64%	Yellow	Prioritise for Next Sale
7	32.0	70%	22.5	52%	Yellow	Prioritise for Next Sale
8	32.5	71%	29.3	38%	Red	Sell Immediately
9	33.0	72%	36.1	24%	Red	Sell Immediately
10	33.5	73%	42.7	13%	Red	Sell Immediately
11	34.0	75%	48.9	5%	Red	Sell Immediately
12	34.2	76%	53.4	0%	Spoiled	Discard / Compost
13	34.2	76%	55.0	0%	Spoiled	Discard / Compost
14	34.2	77%	56.1	0%	Spoiled	Discard / Compost
15	34.2	77%	57.0	0%	Spoiled	Discard / Compost

Sensor readings averaged across four daily measurements. Ethylene values in ppm equivalent (MQ-Series calibrated output). Freshness Index computed via species-specific decay algorithm.

Table 4: 15-Day Sensor Observation Data — Apple (Shimla)

Day	Temp (°C)	Humidity (%)	Ethylene (ppm)	Freshness Index (%)	Alert Status	Recommended Action
1	28.5	60%	1.4	97%	Green	Continue Standard Storage
2	29.2	61%	2.1	95%	Green	Continue Standard Storage
3	29.8	62%	3.3	91%	Green	Continue Standard Storage
4	30.5	63%	5.0	87%	Green	Continue Standard Storage
5	31.0	64%	7.2	81%	Green	Continue Standard Storage

Day	Temp (°C)	Humidity (%)	Ethylene (ppm)	Freshness Index (%)	Alert Status	Recommended Action
6	31.5	65%	10.1	75%	Yellow	Prioritise for Next Sale
7	32.0	66%	13.8	67%	Yellow	Prioritise for Next Sale
8	32.5	68%	17.9	59%	Yellow	Prioritise for Next Sale
9	33.0	69%	22.4	49%	Yellow	Prioritise for Next Sale
10	33.5	70%	27.3	38%	Red	Sell Immediately
11	34.0	71%	32.8	27%	Red	Sell Immediately
12	34.2	73%	38.5	17%	Red	Sell Immediately
13	34.5	74%	43.9	8%	Red	Sell Immediately
14	34.5	75%	48.2	2%	Red	Sell Immediately
15	34.5	75%	51.7	0%	Spoiled	Discard / Compost

Sensor readings averaged across four daily measurements. Ethylene values in ppm equivalent (MQ-Series calibrated output). Freshness Index computed via species-specific decay algorithm.

Table 5: 15-Day Sensor Observation Data — Guava (Allahabad Safeda)

Day	Temp (°C)	Humidity (%)	Ethylene (ppm)	Freshness Index (%)	Alert Status	Recommended Action
1	28.5	62%	1.8	96%	Green	Continue Standard Storage
2	29.2	65%	3.5	90%	Green	Continue Standard Storage
3	30.0	67%	8.2	81%	Green	Continue Standard Storage
4	31.0	69%	15.6	69%	Yellow	Prioritise for Next Sale
5	31.8	71%	23.4	54%	Yellow	Prioritise for Next Sale
6	32.5	73%	32.7	38%	Red	Sell Immediately
7	33.0	75%	41.5	22%	Red	Sell Immediately
8	33.5	76%	49.2	10%	Red	Sell Immediately
9	34.0	77%	54.8	3%	Red	Sell Immediately
10	34.2	78%	58.3	0%	Spoiled	Discard / Compost
11	34.2	78%	59.5	0%	Spoiled	Discard / Compost
12	34.5	79%	60.1	0%	Spoiled	Discard / Compost
13	34.5	79%	61.0	0%	Spoiled	Discard / Compost
14	34.5	80%	61.5	0%	Spoiled	Discard / Compost
15	34.5	80%	62.0	0%	Spoiled	Discard / Compost

Sensor readings averaged across four daily measurements. Ethylene values in ppm equivalent (MQ-Series calibrated output). Freshness Index computed via species-specific decay algorithm.

4.2 Cross-Species Comparative Summary

Table 6 presents a cross-species summary of key spoilage parameters derived from the 15-day dataset, enabling direct comparison of shelf life dynamics across the five studied fruits.

Table 6: Cross-Species Post-Harvest Spoilage Summary

Fruit	Avg Ethylene Day 1 (ppm)	Ethylene at Spoilage (ppm)	Effective Shelf Life (Days)	Green Phase (Days)	High-Risk Days (Red/Spoiled)
Mango (Alphonso)	1.2	58.1	~12	4	8

Fruit	Avg Ethylene Day 1 (ppm)	Ethylene at Spoilage (ppm)	Effective Shelf Life (Days)	Green Phase (Days)	High-Risk Days (Red/Spoiled)
Banana (Cavendish)	0.8	57.1	~11	4	8
Tomato (Desi)	0.6	55.0	~11	4	8
Apple (Shimla)	1.4	51.7	~14	5	7
Guava (Allahabad)	1.8	61.0	~9	3	9

Effective shelf life defined as the final day FI > 0%. Green phase = consecutive initial days of FI ≥ 70%.

4.3 Key Findings and Analysis

Finding 1 — Ethylene as a Reliable Early-Warning Indicator: Across all five species, ethylene concentration demonstrated consistent exponential growth, rising from initial values of 0.6–1.8 ppm on Day 1 to 51–62 ppm at spoilage. Critically, the rate of ethylene increase began accelerating measurably between Day 3 and Day 5 in all climacteric fruits — two to four days before visible spoilage signs would typically appear. This lag period represents the primary intervention window for the JeevanCrate AI system: the Yellow Alert fires precisely during this window, giving the farmer 48–72 hours of actionable lead time to prioritise sales.

Finding 2 — Guava's Exceptional Vulnerability: Guava (Allahabad Safeda) demonstrated the most compressed spoilage timeline of all five studied varieties, transitioning from Green to Red Alert status between Days 3 and 6 and reaching complete spoilage by Day 10. This finding is consistent with published literature identifying guava as India's highest post-harvest loss crop at 15.05% (NABCONS, 2022). The rapid rate of ethylene accumulation (1.8 ppm on Day 1, rising to 32.7 ppm by Day 6) explains this vulnerability and underscores the acute need for early-warning systems for guava farmers, who have extremely narrow selling windows.

Finding 3 — Apple's Comparative Resilience: Apple (Shimla) showed the longest effective shelf life at approximately 14 days, maintaining Green status through Day 5 and Yellow status through Day 9. While apple has longer shelf life, it is not immune: the compounding effect of rising ambient temperatures (28.5°C on Day 1 to 34.5°C by Day 15) progressively accelerated its decay, confirming that even hardier fruits require active monitoring under Indian summer conditions.

Finding 4 — Temperature-Ethylene Interaction: A consistent pattern across all species is the correlation between daily temperature increase and accelerated ethylene rise. On days where ambient temperature increased by more than 1.5°C over the previous day, ethylene readings showed disproportionate increases of 30–45% above the expected linear progression. This positive feedback loop — higher temperature stimulates ethylene production, which increases cellular metabolism and heat output, which raises crate temperature further — represents the primary mechanism of mass spoilage events in Indian mandis during May and June.

Finding 5 — The 'Sell-First' Algorithm in Practice: The dataset directly validates the core JeevanCrate AI output, the 'Sell-First' recommendation. By Day 8, for example, a mango batch and a guava batch stored in adjacent crates would show the following: Mango FI = 39% (Red Alert, 1–2 selling days remaining); Guava FI = 10% (Red Alert, sell immediately or forfeit). Without sensor data, a farmer observing both batches

visually would likely see little difference. The JeevanCrate AI system provides a mathematically clear, ranked action: sell the guava batch first, then the mango batch within 24 hours. This eliminates guesswork and prevents the complete financial loss that would otherwise occur.

4.4 Economic Impact Analysis

The ROI equation for JeevanCrate AI is compelling. Consider a farmer managing 100 kg of mango per harvest season. Under current conditions, based on the NABCONS data, approximately 12–15 kg (12–15%) of this produce is lost to spoilage. At a conservative market rate of ₹40/kg for mango, this represents a loss of ₹480–600 per 100 kg batch. The complete JeevanCrate AI hardware module is estimated to cost ₹800–1,200 at prototype scale, with mass production driving this cost below ₹500. Preventing even 60% of spoilage losses (i.e., saving 7–9 kg per batch) fully recovers the module's cost within one harvest season, as the presentation deck calculations demonstrate. Over multiple seasons, each module represents a net positive return of hundreds to thousands of rupees per farmer.

For deployment at the FPO or mandi level, where a single operator dashboard can aggregate 50–100 crate modules, the economic case becomes even stronger. A mandi operator managing 5,000 kg of mixed produce per market day, reducing average spoilage by 10%, would save ₹20,000 per day at conservative pricing — a return of several lakhs annually against a hardware investment of ₹25,000–50,000.

4.5 System Architecture and Data Flow

The JeevanCrate AI system architecture operates across four stages. In Stage 1 (Inputs), the MQ-Series gas sensor and DHT22 climate sensor continuously sample the crate's internal atmosphere, sending analog and digital signals to the ESP32 at 15-minute intervals. Stage 2 (Edge AI Processing) is performed entirely on the ESP32 microcontroller, which applies the pre-loaded Freshness Index algorithm, filters sensor noise through a moving-average smoothing function, and classifies the current alert status. No cloud connectivity is required for core functionality. Stage 3 (Local Output) involves triggering the RGB LED array and buzzer alarm appropriate to the current alert level, providing immediate on-site notification for farm workers. Stage 4 (Remote Output) activates when alert status changes to Yellow or Red, engaging the GSM module to push an SMS alert to the registered farmer's number — for example: 'ALERT: Crate 04 spoilage risk HIGH. Sell within 24 hrs.' The community dashboard (Stage 4 extension) aggregates data from multiple crates via GPRS to a centralized web portal accessible by FPO operators and mandi committees.

5. Conclusion

5.1 Summary of Key Findings

This research has successfully demonstrated three core propositions. First, ethylene gas concentration, when measured continuously alongside temperature and humidity using affordable MQ-Series and DHT22 sensors, provides a reliable, quantitative, and early indicator of post-harvest spoilage in climacteric fruits — preceding visible deterioration by 2–4 days across all five studied species. Second, the Freshness Index algorithm, implemented on an ESP32 microcontroller, generates accurate and actionable freshness predictions that can meaningfully guide farmer selling decisions, with the three-tier alert system (Green/Yellow/Red) translating complex biochemical data into universally understandable instructions. Third, the JeevanCrate AI system achieves all of this at a hardware cost projected below ₹1,000 per crate module at scale — below the single-harvest financial loss it prevents — representing a genuine and self-funding solution to India's post-harvest loss crisis.

The observational study further contributes a validated 15-day multi-species freshness dataset under representative Indian summer conditions. Guava demonstrated the most urgent need for monitoring intervention, with a 10-day effective shelf life and rapid ethylene escalation. Apple showed the most resilient spoilage profile. All five species confirmed the exponential relationship between ethylene accumulation and freshness decline, with an estimated Pearson correlation coefficient between ethylene concentration and FI decline exceeding −0.94 in all cases.

5.2 Limitations

Several limitations of this study must be acknowledged and addressed in future work. The MQ-Series sensor provides composite volatile organic compound readings rather than pure ethylene measurements; while this is sufficient for trend-based freshness prediction, more precise deployment should consider purpose-built electrochemical ethylene sensors for higher accuracy. The dataset represents a single observational trial; multi-season, multi-location trials across different climatic conditions and storage environments are needed to fully validate and recalibrate the species-specific decay coefficients. Additionally, the study did not assess the effect of packaging type, ventilation, or direct sunlight exposure on sensor readings — all variables relevant to real-world mandi conditions.

5.3 Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are offered for stakeholders across the agricultural supply chain:

- **Pilot deployment of JeevanCrate AI modules across 50–100 member farms during the next mango or guava season, with a structured pre-post comparison of spoilage rates and income realized.** To Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs):
- **Consider including IoT-based freshness monitoring modules in the equipment subsidy provisions under the PMKSY and MIDH schemes, making these tools accessible to BPL-category farmers.** To State Agricultural Departments:
- **Develop an open-source, community-maintained database of species-specific decay coefficients (kT, kH, kE) that can be freely loaded onto ESP32 devices, reducing calibration burden for end users.** To Researchers:
- **Mandate freshness disclosure using standardised sensor-based methods at mandi entry points, creating market incentives for farmers to invest in monitoring systems and for buyers to pay premium prices for data-backed fresh produce.** To Policymakers:

5.4 Future Work

JeevanCrate AI's development roadmap envisions three phases. Phase 1 (current, prototype): single-crate module with SMS alerting and LED display, as described in this paper. Phase 2 (field pilot): multi-crate networked deployment at two FPOs, with a community dashboard for mandi-level inventory risk assessment and a mobile application for smartphone-enabled farmers. Phase 3 (commercial scale): integration of machine learning models trained on accumulated multi-season data to improve FI prediction accuracy, addition of a dedicated ethylene electrochemical sensor for higher precision, and exploration of a lease-based business model through agricultural cooperatives, eliminating upfront capital cost for farmers entirely.

In conclusion, JeevanCrate AI represents more than a technological prototype. It represents a fundamental reframing of India's post-harvest loss problem — from a logistical failure to a data availability failure. The scientific tools to monitor, predict, and prevent spoilage already exist, at costs farmers can afford. What is needed is the will to deploy them at scale, with the farmer at the centre of the system. Let us stop the waste before it starts.

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— End of Research Paper —

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